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IS NATIONAL SERVICE FEASIBLE?

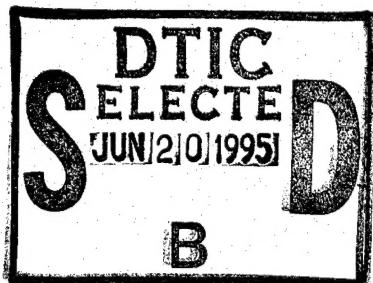
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Is National Service Feasible?

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ABSTRACT

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The concept of service to one's country has been part of American history since the first colonists, but mainly it has been understood in terms of serving in the nation's armed forces. This paper analyzes the feasibility of national service in a variety of forms to meet the foreign and domestic national security needs of the United States. After a survey of the history of national service in America, the ends, ways and means model of national strategy formulation is used to consider various types of national service programs. The study concludes that not only does national service provide cost effective ways of addressing pressing domestic and foreign national security threats, it strengthens the basic values of civic duty and patriotic service.



Introduction

National service can be broadly defined as a period of service given by an individual to the nation or community.¹ National service is usually understood to include service to the nation other than military service. The United States has seen various forms of national service over many years with varying degrees of success and public awareness.

The purpose of this paper is to make a current assessment of the feasibility of national service in light of its potential impact on various areas of domestic and foreign policy. While national service is not mentioned in either the July 1994 or February 1995 versions of the *National Security Strategy of Engagement and Enlargement*, it is implied in several places. The President asserts that America has unique assets to provide leadership in today's world: "our military strength, our dynamic economy, our powerful ideals and, above all, our people."² The President's national service program called AmeriCorps could have been listed among the administration's accomplishments affecting crime, the environment, education and the inculcation of American values.³

¹Michael W. Sherraden and Donald J. Eberly, *National Service: Social, Economic and Military Impacts*, (New York: Pergamon Press, 1982), 3.

²William J. Clinton, *A National Security Strategy of Engagement and Enlargement*, (Washington, D.C.: The White House, 1995), 1.

³William J. Clinton, *A National Security Strategy of Engagement and Enlargement*, (Washington, D.C.: The White House, 1994), 2-3.

The potential impacts of national service could fit into all three of the major sections of the document: Enhancing Our Security, Promoting Prosperity at Home and Promoting Democracy. Finally, the *National Security Strategy* points out that "not all security risks are military in nature."⁴ Serious consideration of national service must be included in any discussion of national security.

Scope:

This paper will use the *ends, ways, means* model of strategy formulation to assess the value of national service for our country. For the purpose of this analysis the following statement of a national security objective (an *end*) is assumed: establish a program of national service which will support domestic and foreign policy goals.

Plan:

First, a brief history of national service in the United States will be presented. Then a variety of proposals will be considered for how a program of national service should be carried out. The concept (*ways*) and the cost in resources (*means*) will be analyzed. The analysis will draw on the lessons learned from actual programs of national service in America.

⁴*Ibid.*, 1.

The History of National Service in America

Many trace the first call for national service to a lecture by William James at Stanford University in 1906 published in 1910 as "The Moral Equivalent of War." The title and concept indicated James' attack on the belief that war's "dreadful hammer is the welder of men into cohesive states, and nowhere but in such states can human nature adequately develop its capacity."⁵ James does not emphasize civic duty in his argument, but does make the case for nonmilitary national service. His proposal would send youth to "coal and iron mines, to freight trains, to fishing fleets in December... to get the childishness knocked out of them and to come back into society with healthier sympathies and soberer ideas."⁶

Although this was the first explicit call for national service, it rests on a longer and deeper tradition which began when the first colonists came to American shores. "Each colony formed its own militia, marking the first appearance of the citizen soldier."⁷ Thus began a long history of compulsory military national service.

Just as long, however, is the history of conscientious objection. Those who refused military service on moral or

⁵William James, quoted in Michael W. Sherraden and Donald J. Eberly, *National Service: Social, Economic and Military Impacts*, (New York: Pergamon Press, 1982), 21.

⁶William James quoted in Charles C. Moskos, *A Call to Civic Service* (New York: The Free Press, 1988), 30.

⁷Charles C. Moskos, *op.cit*, 14.

religious grounds have been fined, jailed, served in non-combat military positions and have performed community service as part of court sentencing. Only after World War I did the draft law permit conscientious objectors to work in a program called Civilian Public Service (CPS). About 12,000 objectors worked in rural conservation camps, some 500 volunteered to be subjects of medical experimentation, and about 2,000 served in asylum and mental wards, "thereby bringing an unprecedented level of humaneness into the handling of mentally ill in this country."⁸ They worked without any pay.

A significant development in the concept of the citizen soldier occurred when Citizens Military Camps were begun in 1915 to train forces to become officers in the event of mass mobilization. The "Plattsburg movement," named after the first such camp in Plattsburg, New York, grew from 4,000 young men in the first year, 16,000 in the second, and 50,000 were projected for the third year, cut short with America's entry into the war. Smaller programs were also begun in 1916 for women and a separate camp was planned for blacks in 1917. A significant impact of the Plattsburg movement was to emphasize the responsibilities of citizenship.⁹

About the same time a strong cry for national service came from Randolph Bourne, a literary critic and objector to World War I. Bourne called for two years of compulsory service for

⁸*Ibid.*, 28.

⁹*Ibid.*, 20-21.

men and women. His suggestions included service caring for dependents, playground attendants and nursing assistants in hospitals. Anthropologist Margaret Mead is another of the very few who have explicitly recommended the inclusion of women in national service. "Mead suggested that a universal national service would compensate for the increasing fragmentation, ignorance, and lack of knowledge of their fellow citizens."¹⁰

The Depression-era Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) looms large on the history of national service in America. The CCC was created in 1933 based on the ideas of Franklin Delano Roosevelt himself. Enrollees were unemployed, single males between eighteen and twenty-five years old. Serving in periods of six months, renewable up to two years, they received food, shelter, uniforms and a monthly payment of thirty dollars. Nine years later when the program ended, over three million men had served in the CCC, with peak enrollment at about 500,000 per year.¹¹

The CCC made an indelible impression on how Americans would view national service. While it was started as a work program for the unemployed, it had deeper significance both in terms of real conservation work accomplished and in terms of personal development and civic responsibility. Alongside the CCC was the National Youth Administration (NYA), a pet project of Eleanor Roosevelt. It was urban while the CCC was rural.

¹⁰Sherraden, *op.cit.*, 24.

¹¹Moskos, *op.cit.*, 32.

It included women as half of its participants and sought to be racially integrated. The NYA was non-residential and paid only fifteen dollars per month. Both the CCC and NYA targeted the needy.¹² That lack of social breadth of these two programs is one of the major drawbacks in their influence on how people would think of national service.

The CCC was generally acclaimed as being highly successful because of the clear evidence of CCC productivity. It had the spotlight because it was one of the first New Deal programs and the public could see the results: reforestation projects, hiking trails and vacation cabins. "The CCC's contributions to preservation and renewal of natural resources and building outdoor recreation facilities were massive."¹³

It is interesting to note that the NYA was bigger than the CCC (4.8 million participants versus only 3 million for the CCC) yet seems to have gotten lost in the national memory banks. Not only did it not get the spotlight as being one of the first New Deal projects, it also was less visible because most participants worked in their home towns.¹⁴ There was not a "going away" as there was for service in either the armed forces or the CCC.

After 1943 the positive regard for national service was virtually non-existent until it appeared again in John F.

¹²*Ibid.*, 34.

¹³Sherraden, *op.cit.*, 42.

¹⁴*Ibid.*

Kennedy's idea of a Peace Corps in 1961. It was "a pure type of service program from the very start." The Peace Corps had three goals: to serve in developing countries, to provide a better understanding of Americans to the host country, and to help the Americans better understand other people and cultures.¹⁵ It should be noted that the Peace Corps was never seen at the federal level as an exemption from the draft. Many local draft boards did, however, grant deferments.

VISTA (Volunteers in Service to America) followed the initial success of the Peace Corps in 1964 as a domestic equivalent.

During the Nixon administration a new program fathered by Senator Henry "Scoop" Jackson was created in 1970. Called the Youth Conservation Corps (YCC), it began as a summer program for fifteen to eighteen year old youth and focused on planting trees, controlling erosion and maintaining public recreation sites. Enrollees were paid minimum wage for a thirty-two hour week with an additional eight hours of unpaid time devoted to environmental training. From 1970 to 1981 the program had 30,000 participants. The YCC was the direct forerunner of the Young Adult Conservation Corps (YACC) which was a year-round program started in 1977. Its peak year was in 1980 with an enrollment of 25,000. Over 200,000 young adults (aged 16 to 23) participated at one time or another. Forty percent were high school dropouts and about a third were minorities. Because

¹⁵Ibid., 49.

YACC was only about twenty-five percent residential, the program did not achieve the same kind of social bonding as many other national service models. Still the YACC achieved an acceptable cost-effectiveness ratio of \$ 1.20 of work for each dollar paid in the program. That was "more favorable than the YCC's and similar to that of the old CCC.... Also impressive was the YACC's outplacement rate -- 74 percent left the program to resume their education, to take employment, or to enter the armed services."¹⁶

The low point of national service followed President Reagan's veto of a bill passed in 1984 by both houses of Congress which would have created the American Conservation Corps (ACC). In addition to CCC-style rural conservation, the ACC proposed pest control, weatherizing poor housing, and cleaning up neighborhoods and parks.

Charles Moskos, a long time advocate of national service programs, describes this period as follows:

By the late 1980's , a young person seeking national service would find it very difficult if not impossible to enter a federal program whose premise was performance of civic duty. The citizen soldier had given way to an all-volunteer force based on market principles. A handful of conscientious objectors who refused draft registration were performing national service at the community level - - as part of their sentences. Fewer than 2,500 young people were in the Peace Corps and VISTA combined. No civilian conservation corps existed.¹⁷

¹⁶Ibid., 58-59.

¹⁷Ibid., 60-61.

The Clinton administration's program of national service is called AmeriCorps and consists of a federally administered program of grants to local and regional service organizations and directly to state-based programs. A pilot summer program began in 1993 with 1,500 participants and was followed in the summer of 1994 with 3,000 enrollees serving in a public safety program.¹⁸

In September 1994 President Clinton swore in the first 15,000 AmeriCorps workers, with an additional 5,000 to join the program before the end of the year. By 1995 AmeriCorps will surpass by 4,000 participants the famous Peace Corps for peak enrollment.¹⁹

AmeriCorps pays a full-time worker an average of \$ 7,640 for 1700 hours of work over a nine to twelve month period. In addition they will receive a \$4,725 reduction in their student loan bill. Thus the total compensation package is nearly \$12,000 plus health care and child-care if necessary.

AmeriCorps' national director Eli Segal says, "The ultimate moral purpose is getting things done in the community. There are other worthwhile by-products... the citizen ethic it fosters is legitimate. We think at a time when there are so

¹⁸Jim Zook, "National Service Races to Get in Gear," *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, December 8, 1993, A32.

¹⁹"Mr. Clinton's Darling," *The Economist*, September 17, 1994, 30-31.

many centrifugal forces pulling us apart, service is a vehicle to pull communities together."²⁰

This brief history of national service would not be complete if it only told of national programs. There have been over twenty successful, year-round, state and local programs across America. They vary from California's Conservation Corps with 2,000 participants per year in 1987 to similar programs in Ohio, Pennsylvania, Texas and five other states with about 400 participants each per year in the mid-1980's. Most of these were at minimum wage or less stipends. There was great variety in targeted membership or not, and residential programs or not.

Several clear patterns are evident from these state and local examples which provide insight into considerations for national service at the federal level. First, the cost per participant varied from \$13,000 to \$19,000 for residential programs; about half of that for non-residential programs. Staff-to-participant ratio is the largest factor in determining the variance in cost. These costs do not include the value of the work actually performed.²¹

Perhaps the most important way to summarize the history of national service in the United States is to say that there has been a significant history of successful programs carried out in a variety of methods, at various times in our country's

²⁰Jim Zook, "National Service Races to Get in Gear," *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, December 8, 1993, A32.

²¹Ibid., 82-86.

history, and at the national, state and local levels. Yet most Americans are unaware of this history with the notable exceptions of the CCC, the Peace Corps, and currently, Americorps.

The Ways and Means of National Service: A Variety of Proposals

The options for how to establish a program of national service are limitless, but basically, the proposals seem to turn on several key issues. The first three concern methods or ways. First, is the program compulsory or voluntary? Included is the related question of the relation of civilian and military forms of national service. Second, what is the method of administration? Third, who is required, encouraged, or targeted to participate? The final issue concerns the means. What will it cost and what will it return on the investment? These four issues are at the heart of determining the feasibility of national service.

1. Should national service be compulsory or voluntary?

The first example of national service in America was clearly compulsory. It began when the first colonists came to American shores. "Each colony formed it's own militia ... founded on the principle that fundamental liberties entailed individual responsibilities."²² Compulsory military national service indeed has a long history.

²²Moskos, *op.cit*, 14.

A significant change to the citizen soldier concept was the abolishment of the draft and the recruitment of an all-volunteer force using conventional marketing techniques in the 1970's. The selective service system was retained as well as the requirement for males to register. Some have seen this change as an erosion of the concept of civic duty. For many, the military service had become just another job.

This was a significant change in the philosophy and public sense of a citizen's duty to serve the country. Although compulsory military service was only for males, something which would no doubt be challenged in today's environment of gender equality, before the so-called All-Volunteer forces there was a widespread belief that everyone owed this duty to the country. Going away from home, enduring hardship and rigorous training, being in danger, and not receiving comparable wages and benefits were all part of "serving your country." The All-Volunteer force changed that concept by increasing the wages and benefits, and marketing it as an exciting way to learn skills and begin a career. To be a part of the nation's armed forces became a career choice instead of service expected of all male citizens.

Before addressing some current proposals on the issue of whether service should be compulsory or voluntary, an additional comment on the dominant non-military example of national service in our history must be made. As we have noted earlier, the Depression-era Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC)

is the main historical image of national service in America.

The CCC, more than any other civic service program in our history, comes close to William James' "moral equivalent of war." The CCC had a military style organization, was physically demanding and emphasized individual responsibility and toughness.²³ While the CCC working conditions were hard and the pay low, the Depression conditions made the CCC look good by comparison. The CCC was voluntary but the alternatives were not very good for those who chose to participate. A direct comparison to the social conditions of today is not valid, but there are incentives which will attract volunteers today as well.

Most of the models of national service in current or recent dialogue are voluntary models. Most include wages at or below the minimum wage scale and some educational benefits. President Clinton's AmeriCorps is of this type.

Oregon's Secretary of State Phil Keisling is an outspoken advocate of a broad mandatory national service program. He recognizes that it would be costly -- probably \$50 billion per year -- to have three to four million young adults in national service. Keisling says that "today's military budget is higher than it would be if highly compensated, career-minded men and women were a substantially smaller backbone of our armed services than today." Keisling estimates that current military personnel needs count for only about 10 percent of the 18-21

²³Sherraden, *op.cit.*, 42.

year old population and he has plans for the rest.

Just think about five areas: education, public safety, health care, the rural environment, the urban environment. Now think of all the work that isn't getting done -- and the tremendous price we're paying for that.²⁴

At the other end of the compulsory/voluntary spectrum is William F. Buckley, Jr.'s plan for universal voluntary national service for all men and women eighteen years old and older. His original plan sketched out in 1973 was the epitome of a non-governmental, non-traditional, non-CCC-type plan based on creating a trend of idealistic civic service beginning with the nation's college age elite. His plan would begin with a statement by the trustees of the ten top-rated private colleges and universities in which it is given as common policy that ... no one accepted into the freshman class will be matriculated until he has passed one year in public service.²⁵

President Clinton made a similar appeal in a letter to all college presidents in September 1994. He suggested that "community service should be included as an important criterion for admissions, and that more work-study money should be allocated for community-service jobs."²⁶

Buckley's plan seems as bare as Keisling's is ambitious. Buckley adds the unique twist of beginning with the "brightest

²⁴Phil Keisling, "Make National Service Mandatory for All," *The Washington Monthly*, January/February 1994, 43-44.

²⁵Sherraden, *op. cit.*, 116.

²⁶Michael Zapler, "President Clinton Swears in 15,000 for National-Service Program," *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, September 21, 1994, 38.

and best" and hoping that will start a trickle-down trend to all youth.

Nearly a generation later in his 1990 book *Gratitude*, Buckley presents a new model of voluntary service with the objective of enrolling eighty percent of the Americans born in 1973 or later by the year 2000.²⁷ He does not like the idea of compulsory service, but rather desires a "heavily subscribed" national service. There are a variety of ways to create inducements to service including outright cash gifts which can be used for education, home mortgages, etc.; tax credits, assuming the national service graduate earns enough to pay federal taxes; and even a five percent tax surcharge for all taxpayers who did not complete a required period of national service.²⁸ Buckley's incentive proposal is much more complex than his lofty 1973 idea. He calls it a Service Franchise, a package of entitlements which a veteran of national service should be granted. The money to pay for the educational benefits of the Buckley program would come from cutting off all federal educational loans to those who are not national service veterans. Furthermore, Buckley envisions a system of sanctions to encourage participation. For example, colleges which do not support the national service requirements for admission would lose federal grant money. States which do not support the

²⁷William F. Buckley, Jr. *Gratitude: Reflections on What We Owe to Our Country* (New York: Random House, 1990), 138.

²⁸Ibid., 114-115.

cause would lose various packages of federal aid. He suggested that states could motivate the non-college-bound youth by using the "ultimate weapon:" denial of a driver's license.²⁹

While Buckley's proposal is still voluntary, it is clear that his combination of incentives and sanctions would have enough teeth in it to motivate a high level of participation. At the same time, the sanctions might produce a sense of resentment and compulsion which defeats some of the positive spirit of a citizen serving his/her country out of gratitude.

During most of America's history alternatives to compulsory military service were not offered. Even President John F. Kennedy's Peace Corps in 1961 was never seen at the federal level as an exemption from the draft, although some local draft boards granted deferments to Peace Corps volunteers.

Studies of a number of state and local service alternatives in the 1980's (after the volunteer Army was established) showed that the consistent reason for participants choosing civilian programs over the military was that the military enlistment seemed too long and required a more concrete commitment. Civilian programs were seen by participants as "an option worth trying, while the military represented a closing of options."³⁰

In the post-draft era, it seems that most viable

²⁹Ibid., 145.

³⁰Moskos, *op. cit.*, 87.

considerations of national service will be voluntary models consisting of various incentives to make them attractive. All proposals must be weighed against the incentives for service in the nation's armed forces and against the historic understanding that in a national emergency, national military service (for men at least) would again be mandatory.

2. What is the method of administration?

With any national service proposal, the first question from the critics, even before cost, will be "Who is going to run it and how?" The aphorism "The Devil's in the details" may apply here.

Nevertheless, the various methods of running national service programs have a track record at least as good as how other large government programs are run. As the history of national service in America indicates, most programs had an overarching federal office in charge and many of those programs worked in concert with state, regional and local organizations. Several successful programs were cooperative ventures with funds shared equally among the Forest Service of the Department of Agriculture, the Department of the Interior, the Bureau of Indian Affairs, the Fish and Wildlife Service and the National Park Service.³¹

AmeriCorps consists of a federally administered program of grants to local and regional service organizations and directly

³¹Moskos, *op. cit.*, 56.

to state-based programs. By matching the resources of the federal government with local initiatives there is less bureaucracy and work gets directed to the heart of community problems more quickly.³² AmeriCorps seems to have derailed the criticism that any program of national service would necessarily create a huge federal bureaucracy.

3. Who is required, encouraged, or targeted to participate?

Because the Depression-era CCC targeted the needy,³³ that lack of social breadth has had a big influence on how people think of national service. That stigma associated with national service seems hard to shake.

A lesson learned from over twenty successful state and local service programs is that even the programs which were not targeted toward unemployed or minorities still attracted a disproportionately high number of those participants. However, programs which emphasized citizenship and civic service were less likely to be "stigmatized as a last resort for dead-end youth."³⁴ William F. Buckley, Jr.'s program discussed earlier originally targeted the nation's elite college youth and assumed the idea of service would catch on. His 1990 proposal, however, uses a combination of incentives and penalties to

³²"Mr. Clinton's Darling," *The Economist*, September 17, 1994, 31.

³³Moskos, *op.cit.*, 34.

³⁴*Ibid.*, 86.

ensure widespread enrollment.

Another lesson is that typical CCC-style rural programs were not attractive to urban youth, especially blacks.

Likewise, rural programs were not sought after by many women.

AmeriCorps seems to be offering enough of a variety of work programs that broader segments of society may be attracted. The four main areas of work are: early childhood and elementary school education; crime prevention and victim services; rebuilding housing, helping the homeless and assisting health care providers; and improving natural wildlands and community environments.³⁵

4. What will it cost and what will it return on the investment?

The first example about cost effectiveness is the 1977 - 1981 Young Adult Conservation Corps (YACC). The YACC achieved a cost-effectiveness ratio of \$ 1.20 of work for each dollar paid in the program. Furthermore, the YACC achieved an impressive outplacement rate with nearly three out of four participants who left the program resuming their education, being employed, or entering the armed services.³⁶ Although it is difficult to quantify all the factors involved, it seems obvious that when one compares the cost of national service to the social costs of the same number of young adults unemployed, on welfare, not

³⁵Tony Chapelle, "AmeriCorps," *The Black Collegian*, October 1994, 38.

³⁶Moskos, *op. cit.*, 58-59.

in school and not productively engaged in anything, one will come out with an overwhelmingly positive view of the payoff from national service.

Another look at cost and benefits comes from data from over twenty state and local programs across America. There is good consensus that the value of conservation work done is at least equal to and usually greater than the costs of the program. "It is much harder to quantify other types of longer-term social benefits -- reduced unemployment, well-being of recipients of social services, lower crime rates, shrunken welfare rolls -- but in all these cases, the level of savings would be large indeed."³⁷

William F. Buckley, Jr. accepts the round figure of \$10,000 per participant per year for residential programs and makes the comparison with the costs of some other programs:

It costs the government \$35,000 per year to maintain a soldier in the modern army. The cost of keeping an inmate in jail is about the same, \$30,000 per year. VISTA volunteers cost an average of \$13,000 per year. ROTC spends \$5,000 per year (for four years) on each of its college students.³⁸

The economic value of service projects is multi-dimensional. One criticism of work done in service projects is that the youth are unskilled, thus incompetent to perform meaningful work. Michael Sherraden and Donald Eberly, who have

³⁷*Ibid.*, 82-86.

³⁸William F. Buckley, Jr., *Gratitude: Reflections on What We Owe to Our Country* (New York: Random House, 1990), 129.

written widely on national service, assert that there is a difference between inexperience and incompetence.

Many young people lack experience, but they are not incompetent. In the postindustrial United States, we have developed a labor market which has left many young people unininvolved. Opportunities for constructive contribution have been too few. But this does not mean that those who are unininvolved are unable.³⁹

The challenge is to provide avenues for productive work experience in the many areas of society where there are real needs. Then competencies and productivity increase and long-term benefits in values, the sense of self-worth, personal responsibility and service develop. Sherraden and Eberly also point to the flawed thinking in the American definition of productivity. If productivity is defined in terms of output per working person, then the unemployed, unproductive persons are left out of the economic picture. A two percent increase in productivity is not good news if there is a three percent increase in unemployment, for example. "Overall production is the key variable because, in one way or another, everyone is supported -- if not by legitimate employment, then by income from government programs, private pensions, crime,"⁴⁰ National service makes people (especially youth and young adults) who would be a drain on productivity positive contributors to national productivity.

³⁹Sherraden, *op.cit.*, 175.

⁴⁰*Ibid.*, 176.

Conclusions

The objective (*ends*) to establish a national service program which will support domestic and foreign policy goals can be achieved. The history of national service in America demonstrates that a wide variety of programs, compulsory and voluntary; federal, state and local; rural, urban and overseas; can work. The methods or concepts (*ways*) have been quite successful. The cost of national service programs (*means*) has been shown to be far better than break-even in terms of the value of work performed for monetary investment. More importantly, there are the huge payoffs -- although difficult to tabulate -- in reduction of joblessness, welfare, crime, aimlessness of many youth, and in the inculcation of values of civic duty, public service and meaningful work.

National service is not a budget-buster. It might be, in fact, the buster of other budget-busters like crime, health care, environmental and infrastructure needs, etc. National service is not a threat to the armed services. It might be, in fact, the threat against the broader threats to national security, domestic and foreign, military and non-military. The risk associated with national service is not in a shortage of means, faulty or unproven ways, or poorly defined ends. The risk is that America will fail to tap the richest resource it has by failing to provide meaningful ways for all citizens to serve their country other than in service in the armed forces.

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